

A fine difference between Discussion and Debate

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There are two almost similar term we have in Bengali, *torko* (debate, তর্ক) and *alochona* (discussion, আলোচনা) Both means almost same, although a formal discussion and debate can be distinguished by their set up. So, why I am writing all these? This is because in a friendly or informal environment, discussion may take the shape of debate and vice versa. So, it is important to draw a thin line between this two, so no one can cross the boundary. You may ask, what is the problem if somebody crosses the line. The problem is it can create a serious fight between two persons or between two groups. The most important thing is the wastage of the precious time. I must put some disclaimer before going to the discussion. Firstly, I am not attaching any reference from any philosophical book, so, it may not be helpful for any kind of academic purpose. Secondly, these conclusions are fully made of personal experiences. So, there may be some point you can disagree. Thirdly, it is not published anywhere else and the copyright completely belongs to me. Fourthly, there is no conflict of interest.

According to oxford English dictionary, discussion means “The action or process of talking about something in order to reach a decision or to exchange ideas.” Now, here we must notice some words. “decision”, “exchange idea”. If we consider decision, then we know that it is a point where everybody’s comment reach a single goal (occasionally). If some disagreement arises then that should be solved before taking the decision. Decision can not be in between an yes and no. you may argue that a decision may be like “do this or that and these two options may be in different pole”. But mind it, it became a decision when everybody decided to do this or that. You may say some can oppose, in that case it will be a decision by majority but not by every member’s consent. So, colloquially it is something like a law passed by the parliament. Now we can come to the second term “exchange idea”. Exchanging idea is the major contributor to have a discussion. It can be an action between a learned and an ignorant, where someone is trying to teach or give idea of something. Like in a classroom a teacher has a discussion with his students or a discussion in a director’s board meeting. During the process of discussion different points can rise and they may be from different directions and the points can be opposite. But what makes it discussion is that they are trying to learn or enrich themselves by others idea.

Now if we come to the point debate, let us see what oxford dictionary says about it. “Debate- A formal discussion on a particular matter in a public meeting or legislative assembly, in which opposing arguments are put forward and which usually ends with a vote.” The points we should notice are “formal discussion”. So, debate is also a discussion with “opposite argument”. this point is very critical is because opposite ideas are meant to be introduced to attack or defend opposite ground. It may be constructive, but it is something like defending a kingdom. So, it is all about to win or try to win. It may have some common ground or agreement in some point but complete agreement cant be possible as it is a clash of ideology.

So, why am I explaining everything about discussion and debate or argument. It frequently happens that we start from a common ground to start a discussion or different ground to have a discussion to reach a single goal but that reaches a fight of thoughts and finally physical fight. Why? It is because when we forget to draw the line between a discussion and a debate. When we deviate from the point of enriching knowledge or having a common goal to make our point victorious. The difference is very fine, but it is there. Suppose you are trying to teach somebody or explaining something then there two case may come. Firstly, the other person is ready to learn. Then he will think from your point of view. Your task is to show different aspects of the point. Or you may say, your job is to put the light on the path. And the other should see the point from your point of view and vice versa. Secondly, if the other person is not ready to learn. In that case you can put light and the other person will not open the eyes or even can put out the light.

Here from the above a conclusion may be drawn that, discussion can convert itself to debate in any moment and that is very difficult to figure out. And most importantly in discussion there is no point of win or loose but in debate it has. Personal feelings and behavior remain in the psychological realm but this specific difference can be discussed within the boundary of philosophy.

Some of the characteristics of this situations are as following-

1. If difficulty rises to make the other to understand;
2. If the pitch of the speakers become louder or higher;
3. If the participants feel irritated;
4. If personal attack comes;
5. If it becomes a fight of false statistics;
6. If the participants abuse others.

Etc....